

Liverpool Film Seminar

2015 – 2016 series

Every year, Liverpool Film Seminar invites six experts to deliver a series of talks. Topics vary greatly and the series does not focus on a specific aspect of film. Instead, a range of genres and approaches are celebrated, from historical reach to the internet's impact on cinematic material.

Professor Philip Drake (Edge Hill University)

Independent film, critical media industry studies, and video-on-demand

In this talk I reflect on the process of working on a funded Digital R&D for the Arts research project on independent film production and distribution. This was a partnership with the public agency, *Film London*, and a commercial business, *We Are Colony* (a VOD platform: www.wearecolony.com).

The platform launched in beta in July 2014 and offered the research 'inside' industry data about audience demand for VOD content, in particular 'companion products' that allow film-makers to present curated additional content to audiences. The project bought distribution rights to a number of titles, allowing their VOD data to be tracked across the platform, interviewed a number of independent film-makers, producers and executives, and conducted an online survey of users. The project aimed to uncover data around VOD and audiences that hitherto has been inaccessible to academic researchers, in order to understand issues faced by low budget independent filmmakers and their audiences.

In the first part of the paper I present key research findings from the project as well as position it in relation to recent research on digital content distribution and independent cinema. In the second part I reflect on the politics of conducting such 'three-way' knowledge exchange research projects with industry partners. Studies of media industries often combine a variety of methodological approaches, drawing on interviews, oral and archival histories, participant observation and ethnographic studies alongside analysis of available industry data. These approaches raise important ethical questions about the relationship between subject and researcher, the status of evidence, and the conditions of industry access. Conducting research in collaboration with industry and policy partners can present both significant advantages and major challenges, and I will conclude with a discussion of a range of issues and debates that arose during the project, and the need to balance and maintain a critical and independent academic approach alongside respect for the different needs of

project partners.

Biography:



Philip Drake is Head of the Department of Media and Professor in Film, Media and Communications at Edge Hill University, UK. He recently co-edited *Hollywood and Law* (BFI Palgrave, 2015) and has researched film marketing and distribution (2008), 'reputational capital' and Hollywood independence (2012), talent and creative industries in the UK (2013), and other areas relating to media industries. He has also written on image rights in Hollywood, and on television and deregulation, and on screen performance and celebrity. He is a member of the Editorial Board of Media Industries Project (MIP) Research, and is completing a research project for an AHRC Nesta and ACE funded Digital R&D for the Arts project on independent film distribution and Video-On Demand (VOD).